Sojourner Truth DRAWER 10 C CONTEMPORARIES

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Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Sojourner Truth

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

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I hear her baby-wagon,
And the little wheels go over my heart:
Oh, when will the light of the darkened house return?
Oh, when will she come who made the hills so fair?

I sit by the parlor-window,
When twilight deepens, and winds get cold without;
But the blessed feet no more come up the walk,
And my little girl and I cry softly together.

SOJOURNER TRUTH, THE LIBYAN SIBYL.

MANY years ago, the few readers of radical Abolitionist papers must often have seen the singular name of Sojourner Truth, announced as a frequent speaker at Anti-Slavery meetings, and as travelling on a sort of self-appointed agency through the country. I had myself often remarked the name, but never met the individual. On one occasion, when our house was filled with company, several eminent clergymen being our guests, notice was brought up to me that Sojourner Truth was below, and requested an interview. Knowing nothing of her but her singular name, I went down, prepared to make the interview short, as the pressure of many other engagements demanded.

When I went into the room, a tall, spare form arose to meet me. She was evidently a full-blooded African, and though now aged and worn with many hardships, still gave the impression of a physical development which in early youth must have been as fine a specimen of the torrid zone as Cumberworth's celebrated statuette of the Negro Woman at the Fountain. Indeed, she so strongly reminded me of that figure, that, when I recall the events of her life, as she narrated them to me, I imagine her as a living, breathing impersonation of that work of art.

I do not recollect ever to have been conversant with any one who had more of that silent and subtle power which we call personal presence than this woman. In the modern Spiritualistic phraseology, she would be described as having a strong sphere. Her tall form, as she rose up before me, is still vivid to my mind. She was dressed in some stout, grayish stuff, neat and clean, though dusty from travel. On her head she wore a bright Madras handkerchief, arranged as a turban, after the manner of her race. She seemed perfectly self-possessed and at her ease, — in fact, there was almost an unconscious superiority, not unmixed with a solemn twinkle of humor, in the odd, composed manner in which she looked down on me. Her whole air had at times a gloomy sort of drollery which impressed one strangely.

"So, this is *you*," she said.

"Yes," I answered.

"Well, honey, de Lord bless ye! I jes' thought I 'd like to come an' have a look at ye. You 's heerd o' me, I reckon?" she added.

"Yes, I think I have. You go about lecturing, do you not?"

"Yes, honey, that 's what I do. The Lord has made me a sign unto this nation, an' I go round a-testifyin', an' showin' on 'em their sins agin my people."

So saying, she took a seat, and, stooping over and crossing her arms on her knees, she looked down on the floor, and appeared to fall into a sort of reverie.

Her great gloomy eyes and her dark face seemed to work with some undercurrent of feeling; she sighed deeply, and occasionally broke out, —

"O Lord! O Lord! Oh, the tears, an' the groans, an' the moans! O Lord!"

I should have said that she was accompanied by a little grandson of ten years, — the fattest, jolliest woolly-headed little specimen of Africa that one can imagine. He was grinning and showing his glistening white teeth in a state of perpetual merriment, and at this moment broke out into an audible giggle, which disturbed the reverie into which his relative was falling.

She looked at him with an indulgent sadness, and then at me.

"Laws, Ma'am, *he* don't know nothin' about it, — *he* don't. Why, I 've seen them poor critters, beat an' 'bused an' hunted, brought in all torn, — ears hangin' all in rags, where the dogs been a-bitin' of 'em!"

This set off our little African Puck into another giggle, in which he seemed perfectly convulsed.

She surveyed him soberly, without the slightest irritation.

"Well, you may bless the Lord you *can* laugh; but I tell you, 't wa'n't no laughin' matter."

By this time I thought her manner so original that it might be worth while to call down my friends; and she seemed perfectly well pleased with the idea. An audience was what she wanted, — it mattered not whether high or low, learned or ignorant. She had things to say, and was ready to say them at all times, and to any one.

I called down Dr. Beecher, Professor Allen, and two or three other clergymen, who, together with my husband and family, made a roomful. No princess could have received a drawing-room with more composed dignity than Sojourner her audience. She stood among them, calm and erect, as one of her own native palm-trees waving alone in the desert. I presented one after another to her, and at last said, —

"Sojourner, this is Dr. Beecher. He is a very celebrated preacher."

"*Is* he?" she said, offering her hand in a condescending manner, and looking down on his white head. "Ye dear lamb, I 'm glad to see ye! De Lord bless ye! I loves preachers. I 'm a kind o' preacher myself."

"You are?" said Dr. Beecher. "Do you preach from the Bible?"

"No, honey, can't preach from de Bible, — can't read a letter."

"Why, Sojourner, what do you preach from, then?"

Her answer was given with a solemn power of voice, peculiar to herself, that hushed every one in the room.

"When I preaches, I has jest one text to preach from, an' I always preaches from this one. *My* text is, 'When I found Jesus.'"

"Well, you could n't have a better one," said one of the ministers.

She paid no attention to him, but stood and seemed swelling with her own thoughts, and then began this narration: —

"Well, now, I 'll jest have to go back, an' tell ye all about it. Ye see, we was all brought over from Africa, father an' mother an' I, an' a lot more of us; an' we was sold up an' down, an' hither an' yon; an' I can 'member, when I was a little thing, not bigger than this 'ere," pointing to her grandson, "how my ole mammy would sit out o' doors in the evenin', an' look up at the stars an' groan. She 'd groan an' groan, an' says I to her, —

"'Mammy, what makes you groan so?'

"An' she 'd say, —

"'Matter enough, chile! I 'm groanin' to think o' my poor children: they don't know where I be, an' I don't know where they be; they looks up at the stars, an' I looks up at the stars, but I can't tell where they be.

"'Now,' she said, 'chile, when you 're grown up, you may be sold away from your mother an' all your ole friends, an' have great troubles come on ye; an'

when you has these troubles come on ye, ye jes' go to God, an' He 'll help ye.'

"An' says I to her, —

"'Who is God, anyhow, mammy?'

"An' says she, —

"'Why, chile, you jes' look up *dar!* It 's Him that made all *dem!*'

"Well, I did n't mind much 'bout God in them days. I grew up pretty lively an' strong, an' could row a boat, or ride a horse, or work round, an' do 'most anything.

"At last I got sold away to a real hard massa an' missis. Oh, I tell you, they *was* hard! 'Peared like I could n't please 'em, nohow. An' then I thought o' what my old mammy told me about God; an' I thought I 'd got into trouble, sure enough, an' I wanted to find God, an' I heerd some one tell a story about a man that met God on a threshin'-floor, an' I thought, 'Well an' good, I 'll have a threshin'-floor, too.' So I went down in the lot, an' I threshed down a place real hard, an' I used to go down there every day, an' pray an' cry with all my might, a-prayin' to the Lord to make my massa an' missis better, but it did n't seem to do no good; an' so says I, one day, —

"'O God, I been a-askin' ye, an' askin' ye, an' askin' ye, for all this long time, to make my massa an' missis better, an' you don't do it, an' what *can* be the reason? Why, maybe you *can't*. Well, I should n't wonder ef you could n't. Well, now, I tell you, I 'll make a bargain with you. Ef you 'll help me to git away from my massa an' missis, I 'll agree to be good; but ef you don't help me, I really don't think I can be. Now,' says I, 'I want to git away; but the trouble 's jest here: ef I try to git away in the night, I can't see; an' ef I try to git away in the daytime, they 'll see me, an' be after me.'

"Then the Lord said to me, 'Git up two or three hours afore daylight, an' start off.'

"An' says I, 'Thank 'ee, Lord! that 's a good thought.'

"So up I got, about three o'clock in the mornin', an' I started an' travelled pretty fast, till, when the sun rose, I was clear away from our place an' our folks, an' out o' sight. An' then I begun to think I did n't know nothin' where to go. So I kneeled down, and says I, —

"'Well, Lord, you 've started me out, an' now please to show me where to go.'

"Then the Lord made a house appear to me, an' He said to me that I was to walk on till I saw that house, an' then go in an' ask the people to take me. An' I travelled all day, an' did n't come to the house till late at night; but when I saw it, sure enough, I went in, an' I told the folks that the Lord sent me; an' they was Quakers, an' real kind they was to me. They jes' took me in, an' did for me as kind as ef I 'd been one of 'em; an' after they 'd giv me supper, they took me into a room where there was a great, tall, white bed; an' they told me to sleep there. Well, honey, I was kind o' skeered when they left me alone with that great white bed; 'cause I never had been in a bed in my life. It never came into my mind they could mean me to sleep in it. An' so I jes' camped down under it, on the floor, an' then I slep' pretty well. In the mornin', when they came in, they asked me ef I had n't been asleep; an' I said, 'Yes, I never slep' better.' An' they said, 'Why, you have n't been in the bed!' An' says I, 'Laws, you did n't think o' seeh a thing as my sleepin' in dat 'ar' *bed*, did you? I never heerd o' seeh a thing in my life.'

"Well, ye see, honey, I stayed an' lived with 'em. An' now jes' look here: instead o' keepin' my promise an' bein' good, as I told the Lord I would, jest as soon as everything got a-goin' easy, *I forgot all about God.*

"Pretty well don't need no help; an' I gin up prayin.' I lived there two or three years, an' then the slaves in New York were all set free, an' ole massa came to our house to make a visit, an' he asked me ef I did n't want to go back an' see the folks on the ole place. An' I told him I did. So he said, ef I 'd jes' git into the wagon with him, he 'd carry me over. Well, jest as I was goin' out

to git into the wagon, *I met God!* an' says I, 'O God, I did n't know as you was so great!' An' I turned right round an' come into the house, an' set down in my room; for 't was God all around me. I could feel it burnin', burnin', burnin' all around me, an' goin' through me; an' I saw I was so wicked, it seemed as ef it would burn me up. An' I said, 'O somebody, somebody, stand between God an' me! for it burns me!' Then, honey, when I said so, I felt as it were somethin' like an *amberill* [umbrella] that came between me an' the light, an' I felt it was *somebody*, — somebody that stood between me an' God; an' it felt cool, like a shade; an' says I, 'Who 's this that stands between me an' God? Is it old Cato?' He was a pious old preacher; but then I seemed to see Cato in the light, an' he was all polluted an' vile, like me; an' I said, 'Is it old Sally?' an' then I saw her, an' she seemed jes' so. An' then says I, '*Who* is this?' An' then, honey, for a while it was like the sun shinin' in a pail o' water, when it moves up an' down; for I begun to feel 't was somebody that loved me; an' I tried to know him. An' I said, 'I know you! I know you! I know you!' — an' then I said, 'I don't know you! I don't know you! I don't know you!' An' when I said, 'I know you, I know you,' the light came; an' when I said, 'I don't know you, I don't know you,' it went, jes' like the sun in a pail o' water. An' finally somethin' spoke out in me an' said, '*This is Jesus!*' An' I spoke out with all my might, an' says I, '*This is Jesus!* Glory be to God!' An' then the whole world grew bright, an' the trees they waved an' waved in glory, an' every little bit o' stone on the ground shone like glass; an' I shouted an' said, 'Praise, praise, praise to the Lord!' An' I begun to feel seeh a love in my soul as I never felt before, — love to all creatures. An' then, all of a sudden, it stopped, an' I said, 'Dar 's de white folks, that have abused you an' beat you an' abused your people, — think o' them!' But then there came another rush of love through my soul, an' I cried out loud, — 'Lord, Lord, I can love *even de white folks!*'

"Honey, I jes' walked round an' round in a dream. Jesus loved me! I knowed it, — I felt it. Jesus was my Jesus. Jesus would love me always. I did n't dare tell nobody; 't was a great secret. Everything had been got away from me that I ever had; an' I thought that ef I let white folks know about this, maybe they 'd get *Him* away, — so I said, 'I 'll keep this close. I won't let any one know.'"

"But, Sojourner, had you never been told about Jesus Christ?"

"No, honey. I had n't heerd no preachin', — been to no meetin'. Nobody had n't told me. I 'd kind o' heerd of Jesus, but thought he was like Gineral Lafayette, or some o' them. But one night there was a Methodist meetin' somewhere in our parts, an' I went; an' they got up an' begun for to tell der 'speriences; an' de fust one begun to speak. I started, 'cause he told about Jesus. 'Why,' says I to myself, 'dat man 's found him, too!' An' another got up an' spoke, an' I said, 'He 's found him, too!' An' finally I said, 'Why, they all know him!' I was so happy! An' then they sung this hymn": (Here Sojourner sang, in a strange, cracked voice, but evidently with all her soul and might, mispronouncing the English, but seeming to derive as much elevation and comfort from bad English as from good): —

'There is a holy city,
A world of light above,
Above the stairs and regions,*
Built by the God of love.

"An everlasting temple,
And saints arrayed in white
There serve their great Redeemer
And dwell with him in light.

"The meanest child of glory
Outshines the radiant sun:
But who can speak the splendor
Of Jesus on his throne?

* Starry regions.

"Is this the man of sorrows
Who stood at Pilate's bar,
Condemned by haughty Herod
And by his men of war?

"He seems a mighty conqueror,
Who spoiled the powers below,
And ransomed many captives
From everlasting woe.

"The hosts of saints around him
Proclaim his work of grace,
The patriarchs and prophets,
And all the godly race,

"Who speak of fiery trials
And tortures on their way;
They came from tribulation
To everlasting day.

"And what shall be my journey,
How long I 'll stay below,
Or what shall be my trials,
Are not for me to know.

"In every day of trouble
I 'll raise my thoughts on high,
I 'll think of that bright temple
And crowns above the sky."

I put in this whole hymn, because Sojourner, carried away with her own feeling, sang it from beginning to end with a triumphant energy that held the whole circle around her intently listening. She sang with the strong barbaric accent of the native African, and with those indescribable upward turns and those deep gutturals which give such a wild, peculiar power to the negro singing, — but above all, with such an overwhelming energy of personal appropriation that the hymn seemed to be fused in the furnace of her feelings and come out recrystallized as a production of her own.

It is said that Rachel was wont to chant the "Marseillaise" in a manner that made her seem, for the time, the very spirit and impersonation of the gaunt, wild, hungry, avenging mob which rose against aristocratic oppression; and in like manner, Sojourner, singing this hymn, seemed to impersonate the fervor of Ethiopia, wild, savage, hunted of all nations, but burning after God in her tropic heart, and stretching her scarred hands towards the glory to be revealed.

"Well, den ye see, after a while I thought I 'd go back an' see de folks on de ole place. Well, you know, de law had passed dat de culled folks was all free; an' my old missis, she had a daughter married about dis time who went to live in Alabama, — an' what did she do but give her my son, a boy about de age of dis yer, for her to take down to Alabama? When I got back to de ole place, they told me about it, an' I went right up to see ole missis, an' says I, —

"'Missis, have you been an' sent my son away down to Alabama?'

"'Yes, I have,' says she; 'he 's gone to live with your young missis.'

"'Oh, Missis,' says I, 'how could you do it?'

"'Poh!' says she, 'what a fuss you make about a little nigger! Got more of 'em now than you know what to do with.'

"I tell you, I stretched up. I felt as tall as the world!

"'Missis,' says I, '*I 'll have my son back agin!*'

"She laughed.

"'*You* will, you nigger? How you goin' to do it? You ha'n't got no money.'

"'No, Missis, — but *God* has, — an' you 'll see He 'll help me!' — an' I turned round an' went out.

"Oh, but I *was* angry to have her speak to me so haughty an' so scornful, as of my chile was n't worth anything. I said to God, 'O Lord, render unto her double!' It was a dreadful prayer, an' I did n't know how true it would come.

"Well, I did n't rightly know which way to turn; but I went to the Lord, an' I said to Him, 'O Lord, of I was as rich as you be, an' you was as poor as I be, I 'd help you, — you *know* I would; and, oh, do help me!' An' I felt sure then that He would.

"Well, I talked with people, an' they said I must git the case before a grand jury. So I went into the town when they

was holdin' a court, to see ef I could find any grand jury. An' I stood round the court-house, an' when they was a-comin' out, I walked right up to the grandest-lookin' one I could see, an' says I to him, —

"'Sir, be you a grand jury?'

"An' then he wanted to know why I asked, an' I told him all about it; an' he asked me all sorts of questions, an' finally he says to me, —

"'I think, ef you pay me ten dollars, that I 'd agree to git your son for you.' An' says he, pointin' to a house over the way, 'You go 'long an' tell your story to the folks in that house, an' I guess they 'll give you the money.'

"Well, I went, an' I told them, an' they gave me twenty dollars; an' then I thought to myself, 'Ef ten dollars will git him, twenty dollars will git him *sartin*.' So I carried it to the man all out, an' said, —

"'Take it all, — only be sure an' git him.'

"Well, finally they got the boy brought back; an' then they tried to frighten him, an' to make him say that I was n't his mammy, an' that he did n't know me; but they could n't make it out. They gave him to me, an' I took him an' carried him home; an' when I came to take off his clothes, there was his poor little back all covered with scars an' hard lumps, where they 'd flogged him.

"Well, you see, honey, I told you how I prayed the Lord to render unto her double. Well, it came true; for I was up at ole missis' house not long after, an' I heerd 'em readin' a letter to her how her daughter's husband had murdered her, — how he 'd thrown her down an' stamped the life out of her, when he was in liquor; an' my ole missis, she giv a screech, an' fell flat on the floor. Then says I, 'O Lord, I did n't mean all that! You took me up too quick.'

"Well, I went in an' tended that poor critter all night. She was out of her mind, — a-cryin', an' callin' for her daughter; an' I held her poor ole head on my arm, an' watched for her as ef she 'd been my babby. An' I watched by her, an' took care on her all through her sickness after that, an' she died in my arms, poor thing!"

"Well, Sojourner, did you always go by this name?"

"No, 'deed! My name was Isabella; but when I left the house of bondage, I left everything behind. I wa'n't goin' to keep nothin' of Egypt on me, an' so I went to the Lord an' asked Him to give me a new name. And the Lord gave me Sojourner, because I was to travel up an' down the land, showin' the people their sins, an' bein' a sign unto them. Afterwards I told the Lord I wanted another name, 'cause everybody else had two names; and the Lord gave me Truth, because I was to declare the truth to the people.

"Ye see some ladies have given me a white satin banner," she said, pulling out of her pocket and unfolding a white banner, printed with many texts, such as, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof," and others of like nature. "Well," she said, "I journeys round to camp-meetins, an' wherever folks is, an' I sets up my banner, an' then I sings, an' then folks always comes up round me, an' then I preaches to 'em. I tells 'em about Jesus, an' I tells 'em about the sins of this people. A great many always comes to hear me; an' they 're right good to me, too, an' say they want to hear me agin."

We all thought it likely; and as the company left her, they shook hands with her, and thanked her for her very original sermon; and one of the ministers was overheard to say to another, "There 's more of the gospel in that story than in most sermons."

Sojourner stayed several days with us, a welcome guest. Her conversation was so strong, simple, shrewd, and with such a droll flavoring of humor, that the Professor was wont to say of an evening, "Come, I am dull, can't you get Sojourner up here to talk a little?" She would come up into the parlor, and sit among pictures

and ornaments, in her simple stuff gown, with her heavy travelling-shoes, the central object of attention both to parents and children, always ready to talk or to sing, and putting into the common flow of conversation the keen edge of some shrewd remark.

"Sojourner, what do you think of Women's Rights?"

"Well, honey, I 's ben to der meetins, an' harked a good deal. Dey wanted me fur to speak. So I got up. Says I, — 'Sisters, I a'n't clear what you 'd be after. Ef women want any rights more 'n dey 's got, why don't dey jes' *take 'em*, an' not be talkin' about it?' Some on 'em came round me, an' asked why I did n't wear Bloomers. An' I told 'em I had Bloomers enough when I was in bondage. You see," she said, "dey used to weave what dey called nigger-cloth, an' each one of us got jes' sech a strip, an' had to wear it widthwise. Them that was short got along pretty well, but as for me" —— She gave an indescribably droll glance at her long limbs and then at us, and added, — "Tell *you*, I had enough of Bloomers in them days."

Sojourner then proceeded to give her views of the relative capacity of the sexes, in her own way.

"S'pose a man's mind holds a quart, an' a woman's don't hold but a pint; ef her pint is *full*, it 's as good as his quart."

Sojourner was fond of singing an extraordinary lyric, commencing, —

"I 'm on my way to Canada,
That cold, but happy land,
The dire effects of Slavery
I can no longer stand.
O righteous Father,
Do look down on me,
And help me on to Canada,
Where colored folks are free!"

The lyric ran on to state, that, when the fugitive crosses the Canada line,

"The Queen comes down unto the shore,
With arms extended wide,
To welcome the poor fugitive
Safe onto Freedom's side."

In the truth thus set forth she seemed to have the most simple faith.

But her chief delight was to talk of "glory," and to sing hymns whose burden was, —

"O glory, glory, glory,
Won't you come along with me?"

and when left to herself, she would often hum these with great delight, nodding her head.

On one occasion, I remember her sitting at a window singing and fervently keeping time with her head, the little black Puck of a grandson meanwhile amusing himself with ornamenting her red-and-yellow turban with green dandelion-curls, which shook and trembled with her emotions, causing him perfect convulsions of delight.

"Sojourner," said the Professor to her, one day, when he heard her singing, "you seem to be very sure about heaven."

"Well, I be," she answered, triumphantly.

"What makes you so sure there is any heaven?"

"Well, 'cause I got such a hankerin' arter it in here," she said, — giving a thump on her breast with her usual energy.

There was at the time an invalid in the house, and Sojourner, on learning it, felt a mission to go and comfort her. It was curious to see the tall, gaunt, dusky figure stalk up to the bed with such an air of conscious authority, and take on herself the office of consoler with such a mixture of authority and tenderness. She talked as from above, — and at the same time, if a pillow needed changing or any office to be rendered, she did it with a strength and handiness that inspired trust. One felt as if the dark, strange woman were quite able to take up the invalid in her bosom, and bear her as a lamb, both physically and spiritually. There was both power and sweetness in that great warm soul and that vigorous frame.

At length, Sojourner, true to her name, departed. She had her mission elsewhere. Where now she is I know not; but she left deep memories behind her.

To these recollections of my own I will add one more anecdote, related by Wendell Phillips.

Speaking of the power of Rachel to move and bear down a whole audience by a few simple words, he said he never knew but one other human being that had that power, and that other was Sojourner Truth. He related a scene of which he was witness. It was at a crowded public meeting in Faneuil Hall, where Frederick Douglas was one of the chief speakers. Douglas had been describing the wrongs of the black race, and as he proceeded, he grew more and more excited, and finally ended by saying that they had no hope of justice from the whites, no possible hope except in their own right arms. It must come to blood; they must fight for themselves, and redeem themselves, or it would never be done.

Sojourner was sitting, tall and dark, on the very front seat, facing the platform; and in the hush of deep feeling, after Douglas sat down, she spoke out in her deep, peculiar voice, heard all over the house, —

"Frederick, *is God dead?*"

The effect was perfectly electrical, and thrilled through the whole house, changing as by a flash the whole feeling of the audience. Not another word she said or needed to say; it was enough.

It is with a sad feeling that one contemplates noble minds and bodies, nobly and grandly formed human beings, that have come to us cramped, scarred, maimed, out of the prison-house of bondage. One longs to know what such beings might have become, if suffered to unfold and expand under the kindly developing influences of education.

It is the theory of some writers, that to the African is reserved, in the later and palmier days of the earth, the full and harmonious development of the religious element in man. The African seems to seize on the tropical fervor and luxuriance of Scripture imagery as something native; he appears to feel himself to be of the same blood with those old burning, simple souls, the patriarchs, prophets, and seers, whose impassioned words seem only grafted as foreign plants on the cooler stock of the Occidental mind.

I cannot but think that Sojourner with the same culture might have spoken words as eloquent and undying as those of the African Saint Augustine or Tertullian. How grand and queenly a woman she might have been, with her wonderful physical vigor, her great heaving sea of emotion, her power of spiritual conception, her quick penetration, and her boundless energy! We might conceive an African type of woman so largely made and moulded, so much fuller in all the elements of life, physical and spiritual, that the dark hue of the skin should seem only to add an appropriate charm, — as Milton says of his Penseroso, whom he imagines

> "Black, but such as in esteem
> Prince Memnon's sister might beseem,
> Or that starred Ethiop queen that strove
> To set her beauty's praise above
> The sea-nymph's."

But though Sojourner Truth has passed away from among us as a wave of the sea, her memory still lives in one of the loftiest and most original works of modern art, the Libyan Sibyl, by Mr. Story, which attracted so much attention in the late World's Exhibition. Some years ago, when visiting Rome, I related Sojourner's history to Mr. Story at a breakfast at his house. Already had his mind begun to turn to Egypt in search of a type of art which should represent a larger and more vigorous development of nature than the cold elegance of Greek lines. His glorious Cleopatra was then in process of evolution, and his mind was working out the problem of her broadly developed nature, of all that slumbering weight and fulness of passion with which this statue seems charged, as a heavy thunder-cloud is charged with electricity.

The history of Sojourner Truth worked in his mind and led him into the deeper recesses of the African nature, — those

unexplored depths of being and feeling, mighty and dark as the gigantic depths of tropical forests, mysterious as the hidden rivers and mines of that burning continent whose life-history is yet to be. A few days after, he told me that he had conceived the idea of a statue which he should call the Libyan Sibyl. Two years subsequently, I revisited Rome, and found the gorgeous Cleopatra finished, a thing to marvel at, as the creation of a new style of beauty, a new manner of art. Mr. Story requested me to come and repeat to him the history of Sojourner Truth, saying that the conception had never left him. I did so; and a day or two after, he showed me the clay model of the Libyan Sibyl. I have never seen the marble statue; but am told by those who have, that it was by far the most impressive work of art at the Exhibition.

A notice of the two statues from the London "Athenæum" must supply a description which I cannot give.

"The Cleopatra and the Sibyl are seated, partly draped, with the characteristic Egyptian gown, that gathers about the *torso* and falls freely around the limbs; the first is covered to the bosom, the second bare to the hips. Queenly Cleopatra rests back against her chair in meditative ease, leaning her cheek against one hand, whose elbow the rail of the seat sustains; the other is outstretched upon her knee, nipping its forefinger upon the thumb thoughtfully, as though some firm, wilful purpose filled her brain, as it seems to set those luxurious features to a smile as if the whole woman 'would.' Upon her head is the coif, bearing in front the mystic *uræus*, or twining basilisk of sovereignty, while from its sides depend the wide Egyptian lappels, or wings, that fall upon her shoulders. The *Sibilla Libica* has crossed her knees,—an action universally held amongst the ancients as indicative of reticence or secrecy, and of power to bind. A secret-keeping looking dame she is, in the full-bloom proportions of ripe womanhood, wherein choosing to place his figure the sculptor has deftly gone between the disputed point whether these women were blooming and wise in youth, or deeply furrowed with age and burdened with the knowledge of centuries, as Virgil, Livy, and Gellius say. Good artistic example might be quoted on both sides. Her forward elbow is propped upon one knee; and to keep her secrets closer, for this Libyan woman is the closest of all the Sibyls, she rests her shut mouth upon one closed palm, as if holding the African mystery deep in the brooding brain that looks out through mournful, warning eyes, seen under the wide shade of the strange horned (ammonite) crest, that bears the mystery of the Tetragrammaton upon its upturned front. Over her full bosom, mother of myriads as she was, hangs the same symbol. Her face has a Nubian cast, her hair wavy and plaited, as is meet."

We hope to see the day when copies both of the Cleopatra and the Libyan Sibyl shall adorn the Capitol at Washington.

The old lady says that, so far from being at the point of death, she has not experienced for many months any symptom of sickness. Her age is now eighty, but her spirit continues as youthful as ever. On Sunday morning she heard Mr. Beecher's opening sermon of the season, which she called 'a feast for her poor old soul.' Sojourner's conversation is witty, sarcastic, sensible, and oftentimes profound. Her varied experience during a long life gives her a rich and deep fountain to draw upon for the entertainment and instruction of her friends, and her reminiscences and comments are equally interesting both to grown folks and children. She looks and acts as if she might live to be a hundred years old. She has uplifted her voice to two generations of mankind, and may yet become sibyl and prophetess to a third."

Sojourner reached Washington during the autumn, and in due time made her long-contemplated visit to the president.

THE STORY OF HER INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT.

The following letter from Sojourner Truth, written by a friend at her dictation, was addressed to Rowland Johnson, who has kindly handed it to us for publication. Our readers will be glad to see Sojourner's own account of her visit to the president.

"FREEDMAN'S VILLAGE, VA., NOV. 17, 1864.

"DEAR FRIEND:—

"I am at Freedman's Village. After visiting the president, I spent three weeks at Mrs. Swisshelm's,

and held two meetings in Washington, at Rev. Mr. Garnet's Presbyterian Church, for the benefit of the Colored Soldiers' Aid Society. These meetings were successful in raising funds. One week after that I went to Mason's Island, and saw the freedmen there, and held several meetings, remained a week and was present at the celebration of the emancipation of the slaves of Maryland, and spoke on that occasion.

"It was about 8 o'clock A. M., when I called on the president. Upon entering his reception room we found about a dozen persons in waiting, among them two colored women. I had quite a pleasant time waiting until he was disengaged, and enjoyed his conversation with others; he showed as much kindness and consideration to the colored persons as to the whites—if there was any difference, more. One case was that of a colored woman who was sick and likely to be turned out of her house on account of her inability to pay her rent. The president listened to her with much attention, and spoke to her with kindness and tenderness. He said he had given so much he could give no more, but told her where to go and get the money, and asked Mrs. C——n to assist her, which she did.

"The president was seated at his desk. Mrs. C. said to him, 'This is Sojourner Truth, who has come all the way from Michigan to see you.' He then arose, gave me his hand, made a bow, and said, 'I am pleased to see you.'

"I said to him, Mr. President, when you first took your seat I feared you would be torn to pieces, for I

likened you unto Daniel, who was thrown into the lion's den; and if the lions did not tear you into pieces, I knew that it would be God that had saved you; and I said if he spared me I would see you before the four years expired, and he has done so, and now I am here to see you for myself.

"He then congratulated me on my having been spared. Then I said, I appreciate you, for you are the best president who has ever taken the seat. He replied: 'I expect you have reference to my having emancipated the slaves in my proclamation. But,' said he, mentioning the names of several of his predecessors (and among them emphatically that of Washington), 'they were all just as good, and would have done just as I have done if the time had come. If the people over the river [pointing across the Potomac] had behaved themselves, I could not have done what I have; but they did not, which gave me the opportunity to do these things.' I then said, I thank God that you were the instrument selected by him and the people to do it. I told him that I had never heard of him before he was talked of for president. He smilingly replied, 'I had heard of you many times before that.'

"He then showed me the Bible presented to him by the colored people of Baltimore, of which you have no doubt seen a description. I have seen it for myself, and it is beautiful beyond description. After I had looked it over, I said to him, This is beautiful indeed; the colored people have given this to the head of the government, and that government once sanctioned laws that would not permit its people to learn

enough to enable them to read this book. And for what? Let them answer who can.

"I must say, and I am proud to say, that I never was treated by any one with more kindness and cordiality than were shown to me by that great and good man, Abraham Lincoln, by the grace of God president of the United States for four years more. He took my little book, and with the same hand that signed the death-warrant of slavery, he wrote as follows:

"'For Aunty Sojourner Truth,

"'Oct. 29, 1864. A. LINCOLN.'

"As I was taking my leave, he arose and took my hand, and said he would be pleased to have me call again. I felt that I was in the presence of a friend, and I now thank God from the bottom of my heart that I always have advocated his cause, and have done it openly and boldly. I shall feel still more in duty bound to do so in time to come. May God assist me.

"Now I must tell you something of this place. I found things quite as well as I expected. I think I can be useful and will stay. The captain in command of the guard has given me his assistance, and by his aid I have obtained a little house, and will move into it to-morrow. Will you ask Mrs. P., or any of my friends, to send me a couple of sheets and a pillow? I find many of the women very ignorant in relation to house-keeping, as most of them were instructed in field labor, but not in household duties. They all seem to think a great deal of me, and want to learn the way we live in the North. I am listened to with attention and respect, and from all things, I judge it is

REMINISCENCES

BY

LUCY N. COLMAN.

I would not have a slave to till my ground,
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews, bought and sold, have ever earned.
No: dear as freedom is, and in my heart's
Just estimation prized above all price,
I had much rather be myself the slave,
And wear the bonds, than fasten them on him.

—*Cowper.*

BUFFALO, N. Y.
H. L. GREEN, PUBLISHER.
1891.

Yours truly
Lucy N. Colman

what authority do you presume to keep any one out of a district of which I am military commander, sir? Do you know that it is through my permission that you are there?" The monthly pass came, and these agents were obliged to endure my visits oftener than was agreeable to them. They vented their spite by refusing the use of their carriage to take me back and forth. The superintendent and wife always rode on horseback, a feat that was not agreeable to me; but there were plenty of colored people in Washington who owned carriages, and they were always glad to use them for my benefit.

Sojourner Truth, who was not allowed to enter the White House as an equal with other visitors, was living at the village at that time, going among the people and teaching them to make the best use of the little the government gave them to live upon. I think here I will give my readers an account of the visit which I made with this remarkable colored woman to President Lincoln, for the purpose of introducing her to him. Sojourner Truth was a slave in the State of New York, freed by the State in 1817. She was then about forty-five years of age, and she lived till 1883. She never learned to read, but her intuition was wonderful. She was what the Spiritualists call mediumistic, but her "control" was God. She held almost hourly converse with, as she supposed, the God of the universe; asked his opinion about any contemplated business that she proposed to do, and went by his direction. She early came into the Antislavery work, and did valiant service as a lecturer. The first time that she visited Ohio she was nearly seventy years old, but she was quite as vigorous as a person of fifty. Some one of the friends of her race fitted her out with horse and buggy, and she traveled some weeks, getting up her own meetings. She said whenever she came to a place where two roads met, she laid the lines down and said, "God, you drive," and he always drove her to some good place, where she had a successful meeting. She paid her way, and her horse was well taken care of, but I think she did not convert to *real* abolitionism many on that trip. The people were curious to hear her talk and sing. Her voice was very fine, and she could sing well after she had passed her hundredth year. She was a great smoker till she was ninety years of age. Going among the freed people, and trying to teach them economy, she found it not best to take with her such a useless habit as smoking.

When Mr. Lincoln was elected President, Sojourner determined to make the journey to Washington to see him — the first Antislavery President — and so her friends sent her with her grandson, a boy of fourteen years, to me. Somehow if anything was to be done for any special colored person, everybody, far and near, knew I was the one to be called upon to do it, and I am glad to remember that however difficult the work to be done I somehow accomplished it.

When Sojourner reached Washington she supposed she could walk right into the White House, have a good chat with the President, and be asked to call again, perhaps but it took some weeks to get an appointment for her. This I finally accomplished by the aid of Mrs. Kaightly, Mrs. Lincoln's dressmaker, a colored woman who, because of her business, was in almost daily communication with the President's family. At last the appointment was made for one Saturday morning at eight o'clock, and promptly at the hour we were there. The war was in progress at that time, and much business occupied even the morning hours of Mr. Lincoln. The receiving-room was well filled before nine o'clock, and still no call came for us. At last, at half-past eleven, the call came for Mrs. Colman and her friend. While we were waiting, there had come into the room a colored woman, whom I asked if she had an appointment with the President, or any one to take her into his presence, to which she answered, "No, but I must see him." I said, "You may go in with me," and so I went into the room with two of the blackest women I ever saw, not as my escort, but I as theirs.

We were obliged to wait long enough for the President to tell one of his funny stories to a deputation of merchant tailors from Baltimore, who had come to ask Mr. Lincoln to pardon or release one of their brother merchants, charged with trading with the rebels. I do not know whether or not the merchant was released, the deputation departed with no answer save the story, and that I have forgotten; I wrote it out at the time and it was published in the New York *Tribune*. When the President was ready I said, "I am very happy, sir, to say to you that I have not come to ask any favor; my business is simply to present to you my friend, Sojourner Truth, a woman widely known, not only in our country, but abroad; she will say to you what she wishes without further help from me." To the other woman I said, "As

soon as Sojourner is through with the President present your business."

Mr. Lincoln was not himself with this colored woman; he had no funny story for her, he called her aunty, as he would his washerwoman, and when she complimented him as the first Antislavery President, he said, "I'm not an Abolitionist; I wouldn't free the slaves if I could save the Union in any other way—I'm obliged to do it." I said to my friend, "We must not detain the President—are you ready?" and saying good-bye, I had just reached the door, when Mr. Lincoln said very earnestly, "Mrs. Colman, won't you come back? Walk in here and take a seat," opening the gate of the railing that separated him from his callers. I went back, took the seat, and by Mr. Lincoln's request read the letter which the colored woman who had gone into the room with me had presented to him. As I read, Mr. Lincoln said, "'Tis a hard case, but what can I do? I have no more money than she has. Can't you take her off my hands?" "Mr. President," I said, "when I came in I told you I had no personal favor to ask of you, but I shall be very happy to grant you one, and if you will put upon this envelope the words you have just repeated to me, 'I think this a hard case, but what can I do? I have no more money than she has,' signing your name as the President of the United States, I will gladly relieve you of this woman." He saw his inconsistency, but taking the letter, wrote upon the envelope, "I think this a worthy object.—Abe Lincoln. When we had done talking, which was some minutes, I knew he was not glad that the war had made him the emancipator of four million slaves. Perhaps he came to rejoice over it, when he realized that by the logic of events his name would be immortal through that act, but at that time he did not see it. He believed in the white race, not in the colored, and did not want them put on an equality.

The letter was from the wife of a colored soldier then at the front. She was hopelessly sick and to be turned out of house for non-payment of rent. The husband had been eleven months in service, but had never been paid for even one month, as no colored soldier had been at that time. When they were paid they only received *seven* dollars per month. Comment is needless.

After the death of Mr. Lincoln, and Mr. Johnson was inaugurated, Sojourner was again interested to see another President.

The usher at the White House—a *colored* man, though much whiter than myself—easily made the way, and Mr. Johnson sent me an invitation to come one Sunday afternoon, and so we went. Mr. Johnson was quite at home with his colored guest, asking her—Mrs. Truth, he called her—to be seated, and refusing to be seated himself while she should stand. At last Sojourner said, "Sit down yourself, President Johnson, Ise used to standing, Ise been a lecturer most fifty years; 'deed I don't know what these United States would have come to if it hadn't been for my lecturing." The President kept on his dignity, invited the old lady to stay longer and to call again.

My work continued with the freed people through the year, though I often visited the hospitals and did what I could to help to while the time away with the poor, maimed and homesick soldiers. A woman's presence was always a joy to them. There was a volunteer nurse, a Mrs. Mary Parker, with whom I was intimate, whose name should be printed in letters of gold in enduring marble. Without pay—as she did not please the woman who had charge of the nurses' department, and was therefore summarily dismissed from further employment—she worked on, giving herself very little rest either day or night, sleeping for an hour or two wherever night overtook her. She slept in the warehouse where the soldiers' supplies were stored, when she could get to the building, and she visited all the hospitals as often as possible in the whole District of Columbia, but more especially in Alexandria. The soldiers told her all their grievances, and she never once failed to get them removed, when they were found to be real and not the effect of a morbid condition.

After the first year of work she had become so well known to President Lincoln, that he said to those whom it concerned, "When Mrs. Parker asks for an ambulance, give her the best pair of horses and the most trusty driver; there's no need of questioning her, she is on some mission of mercy which everybody else has forgotten." The Surgeon-General became her powerful friend, and more than one incompetent and cruel surgeon lost his place by being represented in his true colors to him (the Surgeon-General) by Mary Parker. She received no pay, she shared the soldiers' rations and the soldiers shared with her whatever friends sent to her for her comfort.

One day she came to my room, with her feet literally on the

ground. She did not seem to know it, though it was in March and wet and cold. She was full of enthusiasm about a young soldier whom she had in her tent (some of the western soldiers had given her a tent and pitched it for her, and now she had a home). He was very young, had fallen away on his march and reported drunk or a deserter. She had found him, knew that he was sick, had ordered the ambulance and brought him to her home. After getting him comfortably into bed she had been to the President and he had said yes, yes, to whatever she had desired, and now on her way she had called to tell me and to ask me to come and see "her dear, sick boy."

I looked down at her feet; her toes protruding from the holes in her shoes, and said, "Mary Parker! you haven't been into the White House in such a plight?" She said, "I didn't once think of my feet, and I don't believe the President saw them; I was in such haste to get the pardon, before my poor boy soldier dies, so that he could see it." I took five dollars from my purse, and said, "Swear to me you will buy yourself a pair of shoes on your way home, and I will give you this money to pay for them; I can't afford to give it to you for any other purpose." She said, "I will," but a week after, when she came to tell me her young soldier was dead and buried, her feet were in the same ragged shoes, I said, "Your feet! what does it mean?" "I could not help it," she answered; "I know if you had been with me and seen the soldier that I used the money for you would have forgotten bare feet."

Such was Mary Parker, a woman who for all the years of the war gave herself to the welfare of the soldier. She never received one dollar from the government for her services, but I hope some of the soldiers for whom she worked so faithfully remembered her and helped to make her some remuneration.

Jane Grey Swisshelm, one of the earliest Woman's Rights women—a lineal descendant of the family of Lady Jane Grey—did valiant service in the hospitals. She had the same power, perhaps in a less degree, that the late Leroy Sunderland possessed—her hands holding the limb which was being amputated, or rather from which a part was being removed, soothed the patient and overcame the suffering. But, like my friend Mrs. Parker, she could not come under rules. She knew what and how to do, and when to do it, and so as a soldier she would have been a sharp-shooter

or a scout, never a subordinate. It was my privilege to know her well, and, knowing, to appreciate her.

I used to think, as, in my visits to my various schools, I saw the ambulances filled with maimed and bleeding men, and often dying men, how great must have been the wrong of chattel slavery, that required such a sacrifice of life to abolish; and wondered if woman were only an active power in the government, if she would not have found a way to remove the wrong without the dreadful war. But the thing that most distressed me was to meet young boys handcuffed together, in charge of an officer, charged with deserting, or some lesser offense. These young boys—they were not old enough for men—had been in many cases hired by some man as substitute. Having no idea what a soldier's life meant, charmed by the martial music, they had enlisted, and the life was more than their physical or moral nature could endure, and so they had fallen and were prisoners.

At last came the end, and Richmond was taken. But one morning, less than two weeks from the taking of Richmond, came the shock—the President is dead! What need to write it out? Is not every one familiar with the story?

One thing you are not familiar with, unless you were in Washington or Alexandria, Freedman's Village and Mason Island; that is, the grief of the poor colored people. They looked upon the President as their saviour and they loved him as such, and, added to their grief, they feared that now they would be returned to bondage. It was touching to hear their wailing; every hut whose occupant possessed a rag of black cloth, or not possessing could obtain it, found it a delight to hang it over the door; and when the day came, when for the time being, *all*, without regard to the color of the skin, were allowed to enter the White House, not one failed to look upon the face of their dead friend. And now came the trial of the assassins, all of which you will find in the chronicles of the day. I only make this record, that, so far as I could judge from the evidence, and I attended the trial, Mrs. Surratt had no more to do with the murder of President Lincoln than any other *rebel woman*. She no doubt desired it, as did all the other rebels, but that she in any way aided it or even knew anything of it, until it occurred, was not, in my opinion, proven even by circumstantial evidence. But men seemed mad. I was present in the court when Mrs. Surratt's daughter entered, look-

ing wild with grief. She was not allowed to look one moment upon her mother, but an officer took hold of the poor girl's shoulders, turned her around and put her out of court. Mrs. Surratt was not allowed speech with *woman* after her arrest. *Man* made the law, *man* arrested her, *man* tried her, and by *man* she was pronounced guilty, and by *man* she was hung by the neck until she was dead. I do not find anything to say about "Woman's Rights"—it is all woman's wrongs. My good cousin need not have warned me that I would make my reminiscences unpopular by writing of the rights of woman; I find so much of *wrongs* that I have no space for *rights*.

There were some persons of the other sex that, it seemed to me then and so I still think, were far from guilty of aiding or abetting murder, who were found guilty in a greater or less degree; but the people were mad with fear, and the military commission, as well as the civil authority that tried the prisoners, only carried out the will of the community at large. Had they seen their errors or become less bloodthirsty, that such particular care was taken not to hurt the feelings of that arch traitor, Jefferson Davis? I was on board one of the government gunboats, on my way to Richmond, and saw them putting this man (through whom so many men had lost their lives—oh! so many by starvation)—saw him being put in Fortress Monroe, a prisoner. I little thought then that the guard would be ordered to wear slippers because army shoes, by their noise, disturbed the nerves of the important man!

After the excitement of the death and funeral of the President, the trial of the assassins and the hanging of the condemned, the people breathed quietly, and then came the word that some people, in particular some of the teachers of the schools, would be given a pass and return ticket to Richmond, by paying their fare one way; this favor was to hold good a certain number of days.

I thought I would like to go, but my salary did not admit of much superfluous traveling. I think the fare was $7.00—am not sure. But there was another reason in the way—we were to go to Secretary Dana for passes, and I knew that he was prejudiced against me for the part I had taken in getting the teacher of the orphan asylum removed. Unlike Secretary Stanton, he was an eastern man, and the Massachusetts people were all in favor of

SOJOURNER TRUTH

A Short Review

by Mabel Jones Hall and Agnes Scott Smith

Printed for
Sojourner Truth Library
State University College at New Paltz,
(Ulster County), New York

Part I No review of Ulster County folk history would be complete without mention of one of her most famous and fabulous citizens. Sojourner Truth was born a slave in the little village of Hurley and even her date of birth is doubtful. The Dictionary of American Biography and later researchers into her life give a wide choice from which to elect. Almost every year from 1775 to 1797 is mentioned. Probably the truth is that, like so many of the last generation Negroes, Sojourner did not really know when she was born.

However, a few facts in her early life are clear. She was next to the youngest child of James and Betsy, slaves on the estate of Colonel " 'Ardenburgh", as Sojourner always pronounced it. Colonel Charles Hardenburgh, to whom Sojourner referred, lived on what is now the property of Lyman Schoonmaker (formerly the Stauble farm) at the end of the lane across from the Van Deusen house, one-time capital of New York State.

The new slave baby was named Isabella. She was one of a family of ten children, most of whom she herself saw sold to other slave holding families as soon as they were old enough to do any useful work. The selling of her brothers and sisters and the deep grief of her parents at the time was one of the bitter memories

of her slave days which she never forgot.

The lot of the slave was hard even in New York State and the Dutch were stern, cruel masters. The child Isabella remembered only too clearly the damp, cold cellar rooms of the Hardenburgh house and of her later homes. The small windows admitted but little light, even on sunny days, and the flagging and board floors, laid on the ground, were invariable damp and in the winter bitterly cold. The only beds were thin straw-filled ticks laid in the corners and the older Negroes suffered continually with the "misery".

Many years later in Michigan, recalling those early days for a series of articles on her life that were appearing in a Battle Creek paper, Sojourner explained. "The slave-holders were terrible for promising to give you this or that or such and such a privilege if you would do so and so. When the time of fulfillment comes and one claims the promise, they recollect nothing of the kind and you are likely as not taunted with being a liar, or at best the slave is accused of not having performed his part or condition of the contract."

In illustration of what she meant Sojourner told the story of Charles Brodhead, a Hurley farmer and his slave Ned. Brodhead had promised Ned that when the harvest was over he could visit his wife, a slave on a farm some twenty miles away. Ned worked early and late to gather the hay, but when the harvest was in, Brodhead refused to let him go on the promised visit. Nevertheless, Ned went to his quarters and came out wearing his shoes and best clothes. Brodhead asked what he meant to do and Ned explained that he had been promised and he meant to go. Brodhead grabbed up a convenient sled stick and hit the Negro a terrific blow over the head, cracking his skull and killing him instantly.

Worse even to Sojourner than the cruel death of the Negro, as she recalled the story, was the fact that no official notice was ever taken of Brodhead's act.

Brodhead, according to the law of that day, had as much right to kill a man, if he were his slave, as he had to kill one of his chickens or calves. And the slave's family had no person or authority to whom to turn for justice.

Part II Isabella (she took the name Sojourner Truth many years later) was herself sold at the age of nine to a John Nealy for one hundred dollars. After several subsequent sales, she came into the possession of John Ignasus Dumont, of Ulster Park. In this Isabella was lucky because she always spoke of him as being kind to his workers, but his wife was a hard task mistress. There Isabella was married to a fellow slave named Thomas, had five children and remained until 1827.

In 1827 Sojourner was legally free under the state emancipation act. But to appease the slave owners a clause had been included which allowed them to demand a full year's service from their slaves after the act became law. Within this year, the owners, hoping to realize something on their investment in their slaves, sold the younger Negroes down south.

This had already happened to one of Sojourner's children. She was determined it should not happen to the last of her family. So, when Dumont demanded this year's service, she took her little son Peter and a small bundle of clothing and ran away. She took refuge with Isaac Van Wagener and his family, well-known for his anti-slavery sympathies.

To the Van Wageners she told the story of having gone to the orchard at dusk and prayed. The Lord, she said, had told her to flee and that same night, after she was sure the Dumont family was asleep, she had taken the Lord's advice.

Dumont followed her. She refused to go back with him or allow him to take her son, and so eloquent were her pleadings that Van Wagener bought her services and the services of her son from Dumont for one year for twenty-five dollars. Isabella and what was left of her family was safe.

At the end of the year with the Van Wageners, she and her son found their way to New York City. There she worked as a domestic. She was an intensely religious woman and came under the influence of a fanatical sect. It was while in New York that her son Peter went to sea. After two brief letters he was never heard from again. The teachings of the strange cult and the loss of her son had affected this woman deeply. One morning she suddenly announced to her employer, a Mrs. Whiting that she was leaving. Her name, she said, was no longer Isabella but "Sojourner" and she was going east.

On June 1, 1843 the woman reborn departed for New England with a bundle in one hand, a little basket of provisions in the other and two shillings in her purse. Thereafter, for many years she was to be a pilgrim on the face of the earth. As to her name she once explained, "An' the Lord gave me "Sojourner" because I was to travel up and down the land, showin the people their sins an' bein' a sign unto them. Afterward I told the Lord I wanted another name, 'cause everybody else had two names, an' the Lord gave me "Truth" because I was to declare the truth to the people."

From then on you might find her anywhere. One week she would be in New England, the next in the middle West, then back to her Quaker friends in Pennsylvania. Those were the days of the great anti-slavery crusade and wherever men and women gathered for the cause of helping the slave, there came Sojourner Truth. Later she added temperence and women's rights to her repertoire of "causes". She could neither read nor write, but she was a born orator and her fame as a lecturer increased until in the 1850's she was recognized with Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan B. Anthony and Mrs. Frances D. Gage, as the nation's leading woman speaker.

But the truth is that she was the greatest natural speaker of them all. She was a large woman, six feet tall, with a commanding presence. But her great

attraction was her voice. It was a deep powerful voice with great range and a beautiful singing quality. And she knew how to use it. The date of her birth may be uncertain, much of her life may be reconstructed on hearsay, but hundreds have been willing to testify that to hear Sojourner Truth speak was one of the really great experiences of their lives. It was an experience which even children never forgot. As an orator she cast a hypnotic spell over her audience. And all who ever heard her agree on one explanation: her voice. It was absolutely magnificent. And in addition there was what Harriet Beecher Stowe called, "A silent, a subtle power which we call personal presence."

Part III Sojourner travelled everywhere. She attended camp-meetings, religious services, conventions. And always she contrived to speak. She would enter a gathering, often late, and take a seat quietly in some far corner. There she would sit with bowed, turbaned head (in 1850 she was already an old woman and she invariably wore a neat, freshly ironed bandana on her head), and listen intently to the speaker of the occasion. It might be Dr. Lyman Beecher or William Loyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, the noted Negro orator, or the great Edward Everett, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan B. Anthony or even Abraham Lincoln. A volume of "The Book of Life" which she always carried with her contains all their autographs as well as the names of hundreds of other "cause" leaders of that day.

But sometime during the meeting there would be an opportunity for Sojourner to ask a question or contribute a further thought. Then her countenance would be alive with expression. Occasionally she herself would be the principal speaker, but not often, because, being unable to write, it was difficult for her to organize a sustained speech. So usually she just added her "Two cents worth" as she would say. But often it seems to have been her "Two cents worth" that clinched the subject for the audience.

No orator, preacher or lawyer was able to get ahead of Sojourner Truth in debate or argument. She had a fine mind and was a powerful, though untrained, thinker. Her retorts were not necessarily refined and she was no respecter of persons, but she never failed to hit the nail on the head. Once, at the close of an abolitionist meeting in Ohio a man came up to her. "Old woman", he explained, "I don't care anymore for your talk than I do for the bite of a flea." Quick as a flash she was back at him, "Perhaps not, but God willin', I'll keep yo' scratchin'."

Another time Sojourner was attending the anti-slavery convention in Nantucket. While there she stayed with two austere Quakers. After dinner, as was her custom, she smoked her corn-cob pipe. "Sojourner", said her host, "When thee gets to Heaven what will God say when he smells thy breath strong with tobacco?" "When I gets to Heaven, Massa," she replied, "I 'specs to leave ma breff behin'."

Those who heard her speak, remark on the fact that her style was her own. She talked as she thought, simply and directly, usually addressing her remarks to some individual in the audience. Harriet Beecher Stowe gives a sample of this style in her summary of Sojourner's visit to her home.

The ex-slave arrived at the Stowe house during the evening and gained admittance to the kitchen, where she requested to see Mrs. Stowe. Harriet found her resting on a chair after a tramp of many miles. At the time a coterie of preachers and anti-slavery leaders were holding a discussion evening in the Stowe living room. Leader of the group was Harriet's father, Dr. Lyman Beecher. Harriet asked Sojourner to join them but she demurred. She was very tired. Then Harriet asked Sojourner's permission to bring Dr. Beecher and several of the other men to the kitchen. Sojourner thought she would like that.

The whole group trooped to the kitchen to meet the now famous ex-slave, and Sojourner seemed pleased to see them. Harriet introduced her father, "Sojourner, this is Dr. Beecher. He is a very celebrated preacher."

"Is he?", she replied. Then looking down on his white head, "Ye dear lamb, I'm glad to see ye. De Lawd bless ye. I love preachers. I'm a kind of preacher myself."

"You are?", querried Dr. Beecher. "Do you preach from the Bible?"

"No, honey. Can't preach from the Bible. Can't read a letter".

"Why, Sojourner, what do you preach from then?"

Her answer, Mrs. Stowe explains, was given with solemn power of voice, peculiar to herself, that hushed everyone in the room. "I just has one text, when I preaches," came Sojourner's reply, "and I always preaches from that one. My text is "When I found Jesus". Even Dr. Beecher had to agree that it couldn't be better.

Part IV But she did have another text, although she herself couldn't read it. Friends had given a large banner which she kept snow-white. She hung it above the platform or between two trees at a camp meeting. In large letters it read, "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All The Land Unto All The Inhabitants Thereof."

And Sojourner was interested in other causes besides slavery. In 1842 she attended the National Women's Suffrage Convention at Akron, Ohio. She sat in a corner, her elbows resting on her knees and her chin upon her broad, hard palm. In the intermission she had been selling the narrative of her life, recently published. Some of the delegates feared that her presence might lead to the confusing of their cause with that of the abolitonists. More than once word was sent to the presiding officer, Mrs. Frances D. Gage, "Don't let her speak. It will ruin us."

Gradually the meeting waxed warm. Visiting ministers discussed the resolutions passed and lauded the male intellect. The women, few of whom spoke in meetings, were becoming alarmed at the way things were going for them. Then slowly from her seat rose Sojourner Truth. Taking her place at the front of the auditorium, she laid her old bonnet at her feet and turned her great speaking eyes upon the chair. Mrs. Gage stepped forward and announced, "Sojourner Truth", begging the audience to be quiet for a few minutes.

At the first word there was a profound hush. Sojourner spoke in deep tones that reached every corner of the house. One man had ridiculed the helplessness of women who had to be assisted into carriages and given the best place everywhere. To him she said, "Nobody eber helped me into a carriage or ober mud puddles or gibs me any best place." Then raising herself to her full height, with a voice pitched like rolling thunder she asked, "And ain't I a woman? Look at me", she continued, "Look at my arm". And she bared her right arm to the shoulder, displaying her great muscular prowess. "I have plowed an' planted an' gathered into barns an' no man could head me. An' ain't I a woman? I could work as much an' eat as much as a man when I could git it, and bear de lash as well. An' ain't I a woman? I have had five chilluns an' seen 'em most all sold into slavery, an' when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard, an' ain't I a woman?"

"Dey talks about this t'ing in de head--what do they call it?" "Intellect", volunteered someone nearby, "Dat's it, honey", Sojourner continued. "Now, what's dat to do wid a woman's rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint and yourn holds a quart, wouldn't ye be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?". She glanced at the minister who had made the argument and the cheering was prolonged. She was pointed and witty, solemn and serious at will and ended by asserting, "If de fust women God made was strong enough to turn the world upside down, all alone,

dese togedder", and her gesture took in the audience, "ought to be able to turn it back an' git right side up again. An' now de is askin' to do it, de men better let 'em."

"Amid roars of applause", said Mrs. Gage in her "Reminiscences", "she returned to her corner, leaving more than one of us with streaming eyes and hearts beating with gratitude". Thus, as so frequently happened, Sojourner Truth turned a difficult situation into a splendid victory. She not only made an eloquent plea for the slave, but, placing herself upon the broadest principles of humanity, saved the day for woman suffrage as well.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Sojourner Truth went to Washington and offered her services to President Lincoln, whom she had known for many years. There she helped organize a hospital for wounded Negro soldiers and worked in the large freedmen's camps, located in the city and in northern Virginia. She also worked untiringly to find lodgings and employment for the recently emancipated slaves who flocked to the capital, half-starved and homeless. She also never lost an opportunity to urge President Lincoln to arm the free Negroes of the North for the defense of the Union. He finally did. At this time the Negroes of Maryland presented the President with a beautifully bound Bible. Sojourner made the presentation and the camerman pictured the event.

Part V When the war was over Sojourner realized what many supposedly far-sighted statesmen were unable to understand, that the ballot alone would be of little value to the illiterate ex-slaves. She urged that the first needs of her people were land, self-respecting employment and education. Her ideas were incorporated in hundreds of editorials through out the country. These, together with her own lectures and petitions to Congress which she circulated, finally did force that body to take some action, though inadequate, on the matter.

During the Reconstruction period street cars were in use in Washington, but at that time it was very difficult for colored people to get seats on them. One day Sojourner, though she raised her hand, was passed unnoticed by the drivers of two cars. She then gave three ear-splitting yells, "I want a ride, I want a ride. I WANT A RIDE." People clustered around her, carriages, wagons and go-carts stood still and the passage of the street car was effectively blocked. Before it could move on Sojourner climbed aboard. The angry conductor told her to go to the "Jim-Crow" section or he would put her off. Sojourner quietly informed him that she was neither a Marylander nor a Virginian but from the Empire State of New York and that she knew the law as well as he did. So, he bothered her no more and she continued her ride.

At another time she was sent to Georgetown to get a nurse for the hospital. When returning to Washington, she and the nurse found themselves seated opposite two white women who carried on an audibly whispered conversation about them, and cast scornful glances in their direction. At length one of them called out, "Conductor, do niggers ride in these cars?". He answered a hesitant "Yes". "Well, continued the woman, "tis a shame and disgrace. They ought to have nigger cars on these tracks."

The nurse felt abashed and hung her head in fear, expecting to be ousted from her seat at any moment. But not Sojourner. She looked the white women straight in the eyes and said with spirit, "Of course colored people ride in these cars. They were designed for poor white folks and colored folks. Carriages are for those who can afford them."

"There are the carriages", she continued, pointing out of the window, "ready to take you three or four miles for a six-pence. And then you talk of 'nigger cars'." The faces of the women turned crimson and being unable to stand the amused glances

of the other passengers, they hurriedly left the car at the next stop. "Ah", exclaimed Sojourner Truth as they rose, "they are going to take a carriage. Goodbye, ladies."

One evening in Rochester, N.Y. as Sojourner was returning to the home of a friend after delivering a lecture at the town's largest hall, she was stopped by a policeman who demanded her name and wanted to know where she was going at that hour of the night. Sojourner paused, stuck her cane firmly into the ground and drawing herself up to her full height said in her loud, deep, resonant voice, "I am what I am". The frightened policeman vanished and Sojourner strode on her way chuckling to herself.

But the Civil War really brought her work to a close. First and foremost she had been an anti-slavery crusader and she had lived to see her people free. She was willing to rest.

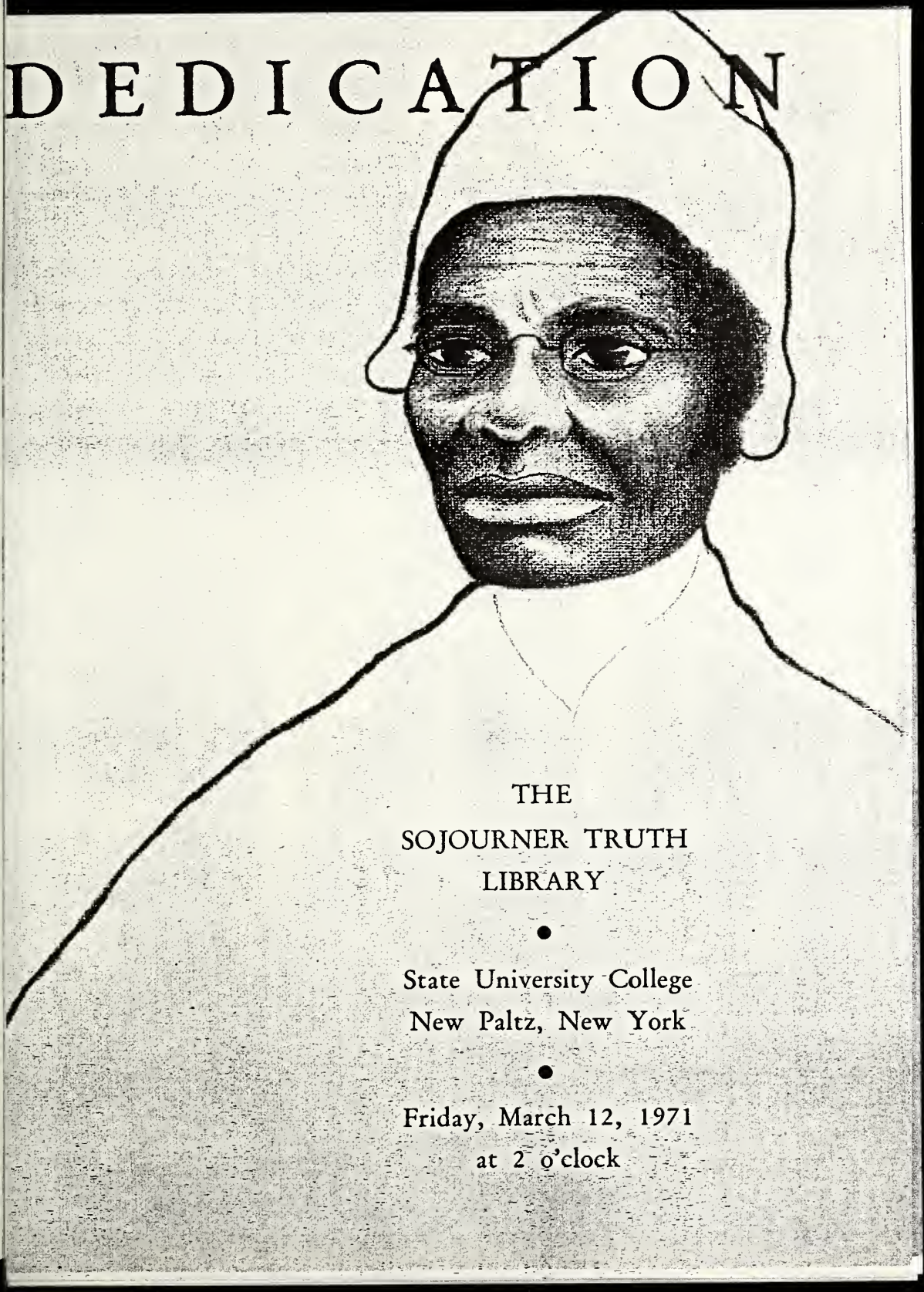
Her last years were spent in the little house that friends had bought for her at Battle Creek, Michigan. Her daughter, Mrs. Schuyler, lived with her. Like all famous old people, she was once asked her prescription for such a long life. "How I come to live so long and keep my mind? Dat what you want to know? Well, honey, it's 'cause I think of the great things of God, not the little no-count things."

When she realized that she was going to die, she was not afraid. In fact she seemed a little excited. To her daughter and a few friends who came to see her that day she said, "I isn't goin' to die, honey. Not really, I'se goin' home like a shootin' star."

Her life closed November 28, 1883. The obituary notices, and there wasn't an important northern paper that didn't mention her death, all said she was 105 years old, which meant that she had been born in 1778. She was buried in the Oak Hill Cemetery at Battle Creek. In 1929 a Battle Creek newspaper (Newspapers

always liked Sojourner. She was superb copy), together with a group of enterprising Negro citizens, sponsored a more fitting marker for her grave. It is a block of rugged granite with a bronze plaque showing Sojourner with President Lincoln meeting a group of freed slaves.

DEDICATION



THE
SOJOURNER TRUTH
LIBRARY

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State University College
New Paltz, New York

•

Friday, March 12, 1971
at 2 o'clock

The Sojourner Truth Library is dedicated to Sojourner Truth, a Negro born in slavery at Hurley, New York in 1797, removed to New Paltz, N. Y. as chattel to John Dumont of New Paltz, finally freed after twenty-eight years of bondage through the generosity and humanity of Isaac Van Wagenen of Rosendale, New York. A woman of great will, courage, and probity, Sojourner Truth spent the following twenty years of her life speaking and working for the causes of abolition and women's rights, becoming increasingly over that period a growing force for emancipation. Her moral power was celebrated by Harriet Beecher Stowe. She was received at the White House by President Lincoln. She spent many years after the Civil War, in which her son had fought bravely, crusading for the rights and just recompense of the slaves freed by that war. She died in 1883 at Battle Creek, Michigan, full of the honor which a courageous life spent in dedicated service to others so surely deserved.

Phyl Garland is the New York editor of Ebony magazine and author of the recent book Sound of Soul, published by the Henry Regnery Press in 1969. Journalist, public speaker, and music critic, Miss Garland has been actively involved in black music and culture, and contemporary affairs. Recently she addressed the Music Educators National Conference, the National Association of Business and Professional Women, and a special seminar on Black Music at Indiana University.

Born in McKeesport, Pennsylvania Miss Garland earned her journalism degree at Northwestern University. She spent several years on the staff of the Pittsburgh Courier before joining Ebony. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta, Theta Sigma Phi, and the National Association of Media Women. She is presently at work on a novel and a book on Black culture in the twentieth century.

PROGRAM

Welcome
Richard J. Shepherd, Librarian, Sojourner Truth Library

Invocation
Rev. Harold F. Schadewald, Hurley Reformed Church, Hurley, N. Y.

Readings of
Sojourner Truth's Words
by
Louise deCormier

Greetings and Introductions
Dr. John J. Neumaier, President, State University College at New Paltz

Presentation
Dr. James S. Smoot, Vice-Chancellor for University-wide Services

"The Importance of History in the Contemporary World"
Address by
Phyl Garland, New York Editor, Ebony magazine

Benediction
Rev. John H. Gilmore, Riverside Baptist Church, Kingston, N.Y.

The Sojourner Truth Library at New Paltz was occupied in January 1969. It is a general library, serving both undergraduates and graduate students. Designed to house 250,000 volumes, its three levels can accomodate 12 hundred readers at tables, individual carrels, private studies, and lounge chairs. The collection contains presently some 220,000 volumes and more than 1700 current magazines, newspapers, and other serial publications.

Notable among its special areas are the Reference Collection, a multi-language summary store of information, the World Study Center, which houses unusually extensive resources on Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and the William J. Haggerty Collection on French Colonial History, a unique gathering of materials on colonialism throughout the world.

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Nelson A. Rockefeller, Governor

State University of New York
Ernest L. Boyer, Chancellor

John J. Neumaier, President, College at New Paltz

Richard J. Shepherd, Librarian,
Sojourner Truth Library, College at New Paltz

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no circumstances be regarded as necessarily meaning "seven days prior to 22 October," Pound makes it clear, in the letter to Harriet Moore, that he has replied to Quiller-Couch already and moreover that enough time has elapsed since writing for a reply from Quiller-Couch to have been a reasonable expectation. The letter can therefore be assigned a date in mid-October, 1912, in all likelihood on or about October 15.

The new Pound letter also extends the primary evidence for Pound's view of his own work at this early stage in his career. Certainly he did excise from all subsequent editions of his work "Ballad for Gloom" and "Portrait," the two lyrics which Quiller-Couch seemingly had asked for and in any case did print in *The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*; but the foregoing letter indicates that the anthologist may well have mentioned another poem; for the provençal quotation is clearly a reference to "Alba Innominata,"

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American Literature,
Nov. 1974

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Harriet Beecher Stowe's Interest in Sojourner Truth, Black Feminist

JEAN LEBEDUN
University of Missouri

ALTHOUGH THE ANTISLAVERY CAUSE was the favorite reform issue of Harriet Beecher Stowe as well as the subject of her most

Sojourner Truth, Bold Prophet: Why Did She Never Learn to Read?

By CARLETON MABEE

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and queenly walk, a national figure in the movements to advance the rights of women and blacks. Amazingly, she accomplished this without ever learning to read and write.

Her illiteracy has long been well known, but the question of why such an able and purposeful woman remained illiterate has usually been only casually considered, if at all.[1] The question is difficult to answer because the original sources available on Sojourner are thin. Also, much of the writing about her, in her time and ours, has been bent more toward making her into a myth for inspiration rather than toward documenting the reality of her life; and Sojourner herself sometimes contributed to the mythmaking.[2] However, the increasing awareness in our time that illiteracy is disturbingly widespread in America, and especially so among blacks, makes the question of why she remained illiterate more poignant.[3]

NY History Jan. 1988

The U.S. Post Office officially issued a Sojourner Truth stamp at a ceremony held

SOJOURNER TRUTH LIBRARY
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Additional information may be found in the Pamphlet File.

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OTHER KEY FIGURES

Library of Congress/Leib Image Archive

Harriet Tubman (1820?–1913)
The "Moses" who set people free

In 1849 Tubman, a Baltimore slave, escaped to Philadelphia and freedom. She returned in 1850 to guide her sister and two nieces to freedom, and then other relatives (including her aged parents), and eventually between sixty and three hundred slaves. At one time, Southern reward for her capture stood at an astounding $40,000.

During the Civil War—which she had foreseen in a vision years earlier—she served both as a nurse and a northern spy and scout, securing military information from blacks behind Confederate lines.

Tubman, sometimes called "the Moses of her people," was a deeply religious woman who never doubted that her actions were guided by God through omens and dreams.

◇

William B. Johnson (1782–1862)
Architect of the Southern Baptist Convention

Converted at age 12, Johnson soon became convinced of a call to ministry. Pastor of various churches, he also served as headmaster of a number of schools.

His interest in missions led him to suggest the inaugural meeting of the General Baptist Missionary Convention and to become its president from 1841 to 1844. A number of Baptists in the South then decided to separate from the Convention, because they were increasingly troubled over the abolitionist leanings and decisions of their northern brethren. Johnson was the leading architect of a new denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention.

The split, as well as the sundering of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches, dealt a psychological blow to North and South. If the churches couldn't find a peaceful way out of the slavery issue, what hope was there for the country?

◇

Sojourner Truth (c. 1797–1883)
Her name defined her mission

Isabella Baumfree was born a slave to a Dutch master in New York who, after her escape in 1827, granted her freedom. She became a domestic helper in New York City.

At age 46 or 47, she had a vision of God telling her to "travel up an' down the land showin' the people their sins an' bein' a sign unto them." This she did, with a new name that defined her mission. She never learned to read or write, but speaking in a heavy Dutch accent, she spread the abolitionist message, using biblical allusions.

During the war she met President Lincoln. After 1865, she worked for the benefit of freed slaves.

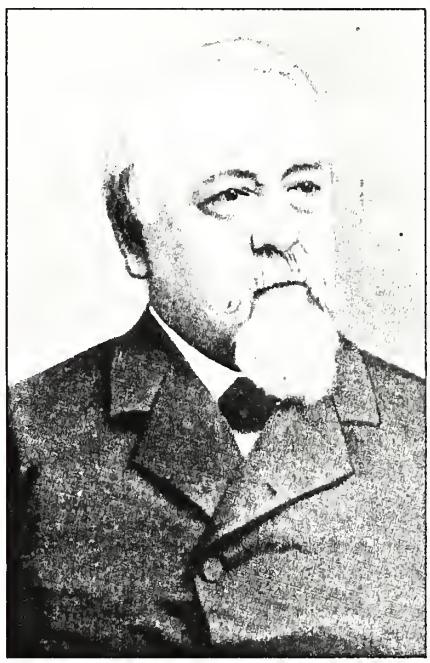
◇

George Hay Stuart (1816–1890)
He financed "ambassadors for Jesus" to the Civil War soldiers

Stuart emigrated from Ireland at age 15. With no formal education, he became a successful Philadelphia banker and dry-goods wholesaler.

In 1861, during an informal convention of the YMCA (Stuart was chairman of the central committee), the United States Christian Commission was born, with Stuart becoming its permanent chairman. It aimed to promote "the spiritual good of the soldiers in the army, and incidentally their intellectual improvement and social and physical comfort."

The commission used lay people as "ambassadors for Jesus" who followed troops. They preached, held prayer meetings, and distributed Bibles, tracts, hymn books, hospital supplies, and food. Stuart collected $6 million and enlisted 5,000 volunteers; distributed were 1.5 million Bibles, 9 million books, and 30 million tracts.



Christ in the Camp by J. William Jones

John William Jones (1836–1909)
Southern army chaplain

"Any history of this army which omits an account of the wonderful influence of religion upon it—which fails to tell how the courage, discipline, and morale was influenced by the humble piety and evangelical zeal of many of its officers and men—would be incomplete and unsatisfactory."

So wrote chaplain J. William Jones of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Indeed, revivals among Confederate soldiers accounted for about 100,000 conversions.

Jones was ordained in the Southern Baptist Convention in 1860 and was headed for China as a missionary when the war broke out. He enlisted as a private in the Confederate army, but within a year he began serving as a chaplain. Jones, along with other chaplains, ministers, and officers, played a prominent role in a series of revivals that swept Lee's Army in 1862–63. He later recorded these events in his *Christ in the Camp* (1877).

File photo

'One person plus one typewriter constitutes a movement.'

Pauli Murray, 1910-1985,
civil rights activist, feminist, teacher,
poet, first woman ordained as an
Episcopal priest

Photos for the Tribune by Jon Freilich/AP

Fannie Lou Hamer, played by Oreler Banks-Murry, leads a stirring rendition of "We Shall Overcome."

Overcoming

Historic feminists lift voices to stir modern sisters

By Julie Edelson Halpert
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

DETROIT—The audience in the dimly lighted room was still. They could see her approaching, a petite woman wearing a turn-of-the-century suit, bowler hat, handbag and wire-rimmed spectacles. As she began to sing, "We shall overcome . . .," her presence filled the room. Soon, 300 voices joined her, rising from their seats, holding hands with their neighbors and swaying to the powerful rhythm of the spiritual.

Fannie Lou Hamer, a 20th Century civil-rights activist, had come to pay a visit.

Though Hamer died in 1977, she lived again for the women gathered on a recent night. She was one of several historic feminists resurrected by the Sojourner Foundation, a 10-year-old funding organization that supports local social programs for women and girls.

The group's priorities are combating violence against women and children, supporting single female parents and educating female teens about pregnancy.

The foundation has awarded $64,000 over the last eight years and is becoming more critical amidst Congress' current slashing of funds for social programs, said Barbara Patton, an advisory board member.

The group's annual showcase

SEE SOJOURNER, PG. 6

Patricia Tomish sees many similarities between herself and Hildegard von Bingen, the medieval nun she played.

The star of the show is Madelyn Porter as Sojourner Truth.

Sojourner

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

event brought to life pioneering female activists of yesteryear to celebrate women's history month and to provide role models for the women of all ages who attended.

In addition to Hamer, this year featured Hildegard von Bingen, a composer and mystic nun from the middle ages; Pauli Murray, the first woman ordained as a Episcopal priest, who lived from 1910 to 1985; Mary Harris, or "Mother Jones," a union organizer; Marija Gimbutas, an archeologist, and, of course, Sojourner Truth, the group's namesake.

"We want to let our women in the community know that a lot of women made contributions to women's rights and equality," said Kate Davis, president of the Sojourner Foundation.

The audience included children as young as 2, together with their mothers and grandmothers. Sally Sharpley, 52, of Detroit, brought her 16-year-old daughter, Marie. She said the family doesn't usually go out on school nights, but she saw the festival as a "unique opportunity to get in touch with who we are" and learn more about black women.

The historic presentations, by actresses, activists and volunteers, were powerful and sermon-like, but spiced with humor.

"At the age of 42 and seven months, I had my awakening. The sisters always told us to keep good notes," said Hildegard von Bingen.

Patricia Tomish, who played von Bingen, saw many similarities between herself and the nun. Tomish completed her masters in anthropology in December 1994 and was searching for career guidance. Taking the advise of von Bingen to "listen to her inner voice," she came to her own revelation, deciding to start a business. At 41, she is nearly the same age that von Bingen was when she had her awakening.

"So frequently society is dictating what we should do, even if it conflicts with our deepest convictions. You have to have the strength to follow your own call," she said, sounding very much like von Bingen.

Similarly, Rev. Beverly Brooks felt a kinship with Pauli Murray and is facing many of the same prejudices in the ministry.

'I was alive and knew God wanted me to do something, She must have had a plan for me!'
Mother Jones

"I was a focused woman. I was a phenomenal woman before phenomenal women became popular," Murray said in her rousing speech.

Despite the inroads that Murray and other women made in religious leadership, "we're still in a generation where women in the ministry are looked on as if they shouldn't be there," said Brooks, an assistant pastor at the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Detroit, one of the oldest black churches in the country.

Dressed in gray flannel work clothes, the spirited, silver-haired Mother Jones approached the stage. She described losing her husband and six children to yellow fever in 1887, then her determination to persevere.

"I was alive and knew God wanted me to do something, She must have had a plan for me!" Though she spent most of her life campaigning for better working conditions for "her boys," Jones told the audience: "Today is new day. I want to talk to my sisters. We have to get into the fray. We cannot be ladies anymore. We must fight like the devil."

Those words could just have easily come from Magi Mooney, a nurse, activist and strong supporter of the Sojourner Foundation, from St. Clair Shores, Mich.

"She's a woman after my own heart," Mooney said of Mother Jones. Sounding as feisty as the character she played, she said equality problems still exist in an era of complacency.

"My peers don't realize that grannies can be useful for change," she said.

Grandmother Patricia Huffman, 53, came to watch the presenters with daughter Tracy Walker, 35, and granddaughter Rachel, 2. Even though Rachel may not understand exactly what's going on, Huffman said, the event will "provide a legacy for [her] so she knows her grandmother is interested in women's issues and will be proud to be a female."

"Hush, hush, somebody's calling my name. Oh, my Lord, oh, my Lord, what shall I do? ... My name, which one is that, I wonder. Oh, I've had a bunch of them in my day. . . . I was born a slave in Ulster County, New York. You see, they had slaves there too. We were part of the livestock."

These words came from Sojourner Truth, played by Madelyn Porter, who concluded the program with the evening's most moving monologue. In colonial dress, speaking in broken English, she told of her hard life as a slave and provided tidbits of wisdom for the modern world.

"I can work as hard as any man and eat as much too, when I can get hold of it!"

Women are still "fighting for their rights, for equal pay, for what to do with our bodies," said Porter. We need to "keep Sojourner's name alive."

Doris Brown, 61, agreed. She attended the event with her daughter, Alicia Brown-Watkins, 35, and her granddaughter, Cilicia Brown, 9. Brown didn't mind paying the $35 fee to bring Cilicia, saying "it's time that she learned about her heritage. If you know where you came from, you know where you're going."

The consciousness-raising at the meeting was meant to invigorate and inspire, but the group's direct impact is from the grants it makes. At the festival, the foundation awarded $1,000 grants to five organizations providing a variety of services, including training for low-income African-American women on AIDS prevention and education on reproductive issues for teenagers.

Jackie Washington, executive director of Planned Parenthood, who attended the meeting as a grant recipient, cited the importance of the Sojouner Foundation.

"We need to prevent teen pregnancy because there's no longer a safety net of government funds," she said.

The event served as a rallying cry for more attention to women's issues. Beverly Holman, chair of the event, said that attention is needed because women are overextended from jobs, child-raising and caring for elderly parents and no longer have time to pursue the feminist cause.

But Miriam Hudson, 41, took time out for Sojourner's feminist celebration with her 8-year-old daughter, Jessica, in tow. Hudson said that hearing about women from the past is beneficial. It creates a sense "that women can do a lot of great things and that my daughter can do great things too," she said.

Mars Robot Is Named After Rights Figure

WASHINGTON, July 15 (AP) — An American robot that is to land on Mars in two years will bear a name suggested by a Bridgeport, Conn., girl: Sojourner, after a black reformer of the Civil War era.

The suggestion by Valerie Ambroise, 12, was chosen from among 3,500 entries offered by students under 18. It invokes the name of Sojourner Truth, who advocated the right of all people to be free.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration announced the name on Friday, the 30th anniversary of the first fly-by of Mars by Mariner 4, which came within 6,00 miles of the planet.

Sojourner, a 25-pound, six-wheele robot, is scheduled to be launched i December 1996 and to land aroun July 4, 1997.

The naming competition was co ducted by the Planetary Society which invited students to submit a essay about a heroine and her ac complishments. NASA picked So journer because it means traveler.

Others proposed naming the robo after Marie Curie, the chemist, an Judy Resnik, who died in the Cha lenger explosion.

Tribune
BOOKS
Chicago Tribune ■ SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6, 1996 ■ SECTION 14

Larger than legend

The real heroism of Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth:
A Life, a Symbol
By Nell Irvin Painter
Norton, 370 pages, $28

By Gerald Early

Walter Lippmann was right when, writing about the general public, he said "there is nothing universal or eternal or unchangeable about our expectations." But it might be added to this that, especially in regards to heroism, our expectations are both reductionist and sentimental. The coda of Nell Irvin Painter's biography of the prominent black abolitionist and feminist Sojourner Truth seems to prove this last point in showing how we create a usable, public history. We have succeeded in reducing and sentimentalizing Truth because we want and need today a certain type of black woman as representative mother figure of antebellum America. As Painter, a professor of American history at Princeton University, tells the story, blacks and whites in the academy have come to agree at least on a certain construction of Sojourner Truth as the sassy, tough, mannish black woman who quieted hostile white and condescending male audiences with a sharp tongue and a fearless eye, a bit like Jesus before the scribes and Pharisees.

The Truth myth or legend is based largely on her impromptu talk at the Akron women's rights conference of 1851, where she allegedly used the phrase "Ar'n't I a woman" in responding to a bunch of sexist, fault-finding ministers who had succeeded in subjugating the cowering white women who supposedly were in change of the meeting. It is a highly charged moment, for the white women are racist and hardly interested in having Truth speak, so she must, as it were, save the cause of women's rights against considerable force of her own sex *and* the white patriarchy. She succeeds by adding the authenticating gravity of her blackness to the issue of women's oppression. As a former slave, she has been treated worse than any woman in the room, but from this experience she has extracted a kind of uncompromising wisdom made all the more legitimate by her illiteracy.

It is a fact that Truth spoke at this meeting and that what she said was of some moment. She certainly spoke up forcefully for the rights of women through the potent but ignored experience of the enslaved woman. However, much of the moment was fabricated by a white feminist named

SEE TRUTH, PAGE 11

Gerald Early is Merle S. Kling professor of modern letters and director of African and Afro-American studies at Washington University in St. Louis.

SOJOURNER TRUTH

Photo from the book jacket

Truth

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Frances Dana Gage writing about Truth 12 years after the event. According to Painter's convincing evidence, it is almost certain that Truth never used the phrase "Ar'n't I a woman"; that the white women at the meeting were never browbeaten by a group of ministers (the white women were quite capable of defending themselves through argument and hardly needed Truth's assistance); and that they were never hostile to Truth's speaking to the group. Yet it is the legend that everyone who knows or cares at all about Truth has come to believe. Indeed, Painter has found it virtually impossible to convince her students or her colleagues of the facts. Remarkably, Truth's speech, as recorded at the time it was given by Marius Robinson, a closer friend of Truth's than Gage ever was, without the "Ar'n't I a woman" refrain, seems more incisive in its imagery and construction than the popular revision that Gage supplied.

It is easy to see why the Gage version is so widely and deeply accepted by learned and even popular audiences. For the purposes of black and feminist history, we need a black, female figure from the 19th Century who was a public speaker for the causes of women's rights and abolition, who was a slave and who had endured abuse. In our quest for a new American history, Truth as the old, tough, slave woman becomes, in effect, the Left's version of the politicized mammy, of the militant auntie, the black mother as Brecht's Mother Courage or Kurt Weill's Pirate Jenny or Richard Wright's revolutionary mother figure in "Uncle Tom's Children." This not only sentimentalizes Truth but reduces her by ignoring her religious self (religion was far and away the most important force in her life), her doubts, her compromises, her sheer dumb fumblings, her courage in simply surviving slavery as a woman who could even speak in public with confidence (no matter the subject or how sensibly she in fact did speak). In other words, the very factors that give her life a rich complexity and deep resonance, that make her truly worthy of being considered a hero, are simply dropped from consideration for our simplistic and childish contemporary needs. Painter tries to give us this real Sojourner Truth in her judicious and balanced biography.

Isabella Van Wagenen was born a slave in the late 1790s in Ulster County, New York. This fact alone is of incredible importance, for the woman who became Sojourner Truth grew up a slave in the North, the most famous slave from that region. Indeed, it is often forgotten that slavery existed in both the North and the South before the 19th Century and that it was not outlawed in New York until 1827. Like most of the blacks of the area, she was deeply influenced by the Dutch culture of the white inhabitants. She worked for a family named Dumont, and, according to Painter, the husband beat her on occasion and the wife sexually abused her. Her master eventually forced her to marry a significantly older man, by whom she had five children, all born into slavery. Toward the end of her term as a slave, she worked for a family named Van Wagenen, who were much kinder than the Dumonts, and she took their name.

Her first courageous act was suing the Gedneys, the family to whom her only son, Peter, had been sold by the Dumonts. The Gedneys had, in turn, sold the boy to a family in Alabama on the eve of the abolition of slavery in New York. This was a common practice for some Northern slaveholders, although it was illegal in New York state. Isabella won the case and got her son back, only to lose him at sea when the troubled youth became a sailor.

In 1843, Isabella Van Wagenen, following the voice of God, became Sojourner Truth. She got involved with white abolitionists and started traveling around the country, speaking out against slavery. It should be remembered that between 1827 and 1843, Truth had been involved in several millenarian religious movements. She was, like many poor, working-class people, drawn to the idea of prophecy, to Pentecostal fervor, to the imminent return of Christ, to the idea of the immediate end of history. She was first drawn to Methodism, then to the "Holy Club" of disaffected Methodists, then to Prophet Matthias, then to the Millerites. Joining more fringe religious movements gave her the opportunity to speak, to become a minister, something that, as a woman and an uneducated person, she could not have done in a more mainstream denomination whether black or white.

Truth spent her whole life almost exclusively in the company of whites. This might be attributed to the kind of slavery she experienced, in which there was no sizable community of slaves, as on Southern plantations. All the religious movements she joined were white; all the people with whom she lived were white, and she often worked for them as a servant. She seemed to like doing this for white people she liked, and she seemed to prefer whites to blacks. The people who shaped her public image during her life were white women. When she spoke before black audiences, such as in Washington during Reconstruction, her reception was decidedly mixed. She was a marginal person who was profoundly alienated from her own marginal group, blacks. This is not unusual, although it may be opportunistic for both parties, black as well as white. In this instance, Truth had powerful patrons who would care for her in her old age (a real concern), and the whites had an exotic article of authentic female slave experience. Because she was a poor, unlettered woman and was trying to make a life as a public speaker, a kind of minister without church or portfolio, she needed whites as supporters and guarantors. She was trying to live solely off her fame. The problem was that her fame was such a tender reed. She did nothing but try to live a life with some dignity and talk. That is why she wrote her autobiography in the late 1840s and hustled it energetically, why she sold pictures of herself in the 1860s. These facts alone, clearly creating an interesting, interpretive tension, make Truth a complex figure who demands rigorous thought and attention.

We learn from Painter's biography that most of the hooks upon which Truth's reputation hangs are not very sturdy. She did not plead the freedpeople's case before Lincoln on several occasions. She met him only once, briefly, and he was not taken with her. She never said to Frederick Douglass, when he gave a speech in 1852 in Ohio despairing the fact that blacks cannot find justice in America and saying they should take arms, "Frederick, is God dead?"—a statement that supposedly stopped him dead in his tracks. (It would seem far from an unanswerable question for any black person living in the U.S. under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The answer would be clearly that, yes, God is dead for black people in the United States.) She actually asked him, "Is God gone?"—a far less dramatic question.

What Painter does as a first-rate historian is peel away the myths and legends so that we might get at a historical Sojourner Truth, a woman of extraordinary strength of character, whose heroism is all the more compelling because it is all the more real, tied to her insecurities, her need for validation, the power and compulsion of her distorted but magnificently reinvented ego. Out of the ashes of a soul-crushing slavery rose this woman. As Painter points out, "No other woman who had been through the ordeal of slavery managed to survive with sufficient strength, poise, and self-confidence to become a pubic presence over the long term." This is the Sojourner Truth we need as Americans. I am thankful that professor Painter was able to give her to us.

Things to See and Do

SPLASHING THROUGH WATERFALL COUNTRY

All but two of Michigan's more than 150 waterfalls tumble through the Upper Peninsula. The star is Upper Tahquamenon Falls, the second-largest falls east of the Mississippi River (only Niagara is bigger).

Northeast of Newberry off State-123 in Tahquamenon Falls State Park, the Tahquamenon River plunges over two falls: the 200-foot wide, 50-foot-tall Upper Falls and the tamer Lower Falls, 4 miles downstream.

Trails take you to overlooks, and two excursions travel to the Upper Falls. The *Tom Sawyer Riverboat* departs from Hulbert. Or you can ride the Toonerville Trolley from Soo Junction.

JOHN S. FRAUS

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore shelters Munising, Sable and Chapel Falls *(pictured, above)*. McCormick Wilderness (located 50 miles west of Marquette) harbors a half-dozen pristine falls along the Yellow Dog River alone.

In the UP's northwest corner, seven falls cascade along the Black River National Forest Scenic Byway. "Michigan's Upper Peninsula Travel Planner For All Seasons" locates UP waterfalls. For a free copy, contact: *Upper Peninsula Travel & Recreation Assoc. (800/562-7134).*

TRAVERSE AREA CHERRY DELIGHTS

Treat yourself to cherries fixed every which way—from cherry-almond butter to cherry-pecan sausage—in Traverse City, the "Cherry Capital of the World."

Orchards thrive along the area's 250 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. The four-

BETTMANN

AFRICAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE SITES

Museums and historic sites celebrate the rich heritage of Michigan's African-American community. Call ahead for information about hours and admission charges.

At Detroit's Museum of African-American History (313/833-9800), exhibits examine slavery, as well as the achievements of African-Americans. The Kimball House Museum in Battle Creek (616/966-2496) includes displays about abolitionist and human-rights activist Sojourner Truth *(pictured, left).*

The Motown Historical Museum in Detroit (313/875-2264), closed since fall for renovation, reopens on May 25, 1995. Here, you'll find the entire Hitsville USA house, Motown Records Corporation's original home. Concurrent with the reopening, the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn (313/875-2264) features "The Motown Sound: The Music and the Story." (A shuttle travels between the Ford and Motown museums.)

"I was an ex-slave...and yet I was to meet the most exalted person in this great republic..."

Two African Americans on their meetings with Abraham Lincoln

Sojourner Truth (1797? -1883) lacked many of Douglass' opportunities, working as a field hand and never learning to read or write. Intense religious experiences, in which she heard God's voice, gave her unusual independence and strength. Despite her illiteracy, she was, like Douglass, a skillful public speaker, and was recognized as a religious leader as early as the 1830s. In 1843 she turned her attention to abolitionism, and in 1850 she began demanding equality for women as well.

Frederick Douglass and Sojournor Truth were both born in slavery, and both later met with Lincoln in the White House. Douglas (1817-1895) had been a companion to his master's son, and later worked as a house-servant in Baltimore, where slaves had more personal freedom than they did on the plantations. In Baltimore he learned to read and write, and was eventually able to escape to Massachusetts. There he discovered and developed a talent for public speaking, eventually becoming an influential abolitionist.

Sojourner Truth

Since the mid-1850s Sojourner Truth had been living in Battle Creek, Michigan, and during the war she worked there to raise money for black soldiers. In 1864 she was inspired to make the cross-country trip to Washington so that she could meet the president. After the meeting she dictated a letter to Rowland Johnson describing her experience. She directed him to arrange for it to be published in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (December 17, 1864). Although she had had to wait outside Lincoln's office for three and a half hours before he could see her, her letter betrays no annoyance at the inconvenience. "I had quite a pleasant time waiting until he was disengaged, and enjoyed his conversation with others; he showed as much kindness and consideration to the colored persons as to the white --- if there was any difference, more. ... The president was seated at his desk. ... [After I was introduced,] he then arose, gave me his hand, made a bow, and said, 'I am pleased to see you.' ... I must say, and I am proud to say, that I never was treated by any one with more kindness and cordiality than were shown to me by that great and good man, Abraham Lincoln, by the grace of God President of the United States for four years more. He took my little book, and with the same hand that signed the death-warrant of slavery, he wrote as follows: *'For Aunty Sojourner Truth, Oct. 29, 1864. A. Lincoln.'* As I was taking my leave, he arose and took my hand, and said he would be pleased to have me call again. I felt that I was in the presence of a friend..."

Frederick Douglass

In the spring and summer of 1863 Douglass had been recruiting black soldiers for the army, but by August he was discouraged by the way black soldiers were being treated. (They received less pay than white soldiers, they could not become officers, and they risked being sold into slavery if captured by the Confederates.) Some of Douglass' friends convinced him to take his concerns to the president. In his autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 1882, he describes the meeting: "I need not say that at the time I undertook this mission it required much more nerve than a similar one would require now. ... I was an ex-slave, identified with a despised race; and yet I was to meet the most exalted person in this great republic. ... Happily for me, there was no vain pomp and ceremony about [Lincoln]. I was never more quickly or more completely put at ease in the presence of a great man, than in that of Abraham Lincoln.... As I approached and was introduced to him, he rose and extended his hand, and bade me welcome. I at once felt myself in the presence of an honest man --- one whom I could love, honor and trust without reserve or doubt. Proceeding to tell him who I was, and what I was doing, he promptly, but kindly, stopped me, saying 'I know who you are, Mr. Douglass; Mr. Seward has told me all about you. Sit down, I am glad to see you.' ... He impressed me with the solid gravity of his character, by his silent listening not less than by his earnest reply to my words.... Though I was not entirely satisfied with his views, I was so well satisfied with the man and with the educating tendency of the conflict, I determined to go on with the recruiting."

The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company was granted permission in 1905 to use Lincoln's name by the President's son, Robert Todd Lincoln. Lincoln National Life has since 1928 sponsored historical research and programs through The Lincoln Museum. This brochure produced by the library and museum staff, is made available to the public by the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company and its local representatives.

LINCOLN NATIONAL CORPORATION

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